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# Dublin in Irish Legend

BY  
J. M. FLOOD



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DUBLIN IN IRISH LEGEND





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# IRISH LEGEND

BY  
J. M. FLOOD



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## PREFACE.

I HAVE brought together in this essay such references to localities in the County Dublin as my reading of the Heroic Period of Irish History afforded. It will be understood that as Dublin was not a place of any importance in Ireland at the earliest times of which we have any record it is not frequently mentioned in our old stories, and I venture to think that allusion has been made to almost all its legendary associations. The knowledge of these legends will, I hope, serve to heighten the love which Dubliners have for the beautiful country around the city, and to give an added interest to scenes which are lovely in themselves, and which are already endeared by many associations and memories. Only such portions of the legends as refer to places in the county have been referred to. To have told the stories in full would require a much larger work than the present essay, and would have been foreign to the purpose which it is intended to serve. For those who wish to read the originals, I append a list of the more important sources from which information has been obtained :

*Crimthann Nuad Nair*—D'Arbois de Jubainville : *Le Cycle Mythologique Irlandais*, cap. XV.

*Tristan and Iseult*—Gottfried Von Strassburg.  
(English Version by Jessie L. Weston).

*Legends of the Fianna*—Standish Hayes O'Grady :  
*Silva Gadelica passim*.

*Siege of Howth*—Extract from the Talland Etair,  
translated by W. M. Hennessy.

*The Courtship of Cuchulainn and Emer*—O'Curry.  
Manuscript Materials of Antient Irish History,  
p. 37, *et seq.*

*The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*—O'Curry.  
Manners and Customs of the Antient Irish,  
cap. XXV.

*Irish Place Names*, by P. W. Joyce.

J. M. Flood.

DUBLIN,

August, 1919.



## DUBLIN IN IRISH LEGEND.

**I**N describing the charm of Dublin, Edward Dowden mentioned the legendary associations connected with places in the environs of the city as one of the circumstances that give a characteristic charm to the capital of Ireland. "Over some of the spots," he writes, "now accessible in a brief space of time by tram car or train from the midst of the city, romantic memories hover. Here in Howth Park stands a cromlech under which lies Aideen of Ben Edar, who pined away and died when her husband, Oscar, son of Oisín, fell at the Battle of Gavra. Round her grave the Fenian heroes stood sorrowing.

"They heaved the stone, they heaped the cairn.

Said Oisín, 'In a queenly grave  
We leave her, 'mong the fields of fern,  
Between the cliff and wave.'

The cliff behind stands clear and bare,  
And bare, above, the heathery steep  
Scales the clear heaven's expanse to where  
The Danaan Druids sleep."

. . . Elsewhere, but still on the outskirts of Dublin, is a spot fatal not in the annals of war but of love—Chapelizod—a village from which rises a gray church tower. Here Sir Tristram of the Round Table, disguised as a harper and calling himself Tramtrist, was put in the keeping of the beautiful Iseult to be healed of the wound received from her brother's envenomed spear. Here when restored he was arrayed by Iseult's hand in harness and set forth to the jousts. 'And right, so she put him out at a priory postern, and so he came into the field as if he had been a bright angel.' More potent than any love philtre it is to have saved a noble champion from despair and death, and to have sent him forth arrayed

by her hands to do deeds of high emprise. Iseult's Tower, near Dublin Castle, has disappeared and Iseult's Fount no longer murmurs and gleams; but Chapelizod is at least a living name. If anyone in our nineteenth century should follow Dante to that 'second circle of sad hell' where he beheld Tristram, it will be a momentary solace to that afflicted lover to learn that his story is still sung on earth by high poets, and that pilgrims now and again visit the spot where Iseult of Ireland shed tears at his leave-taking."

The two legends referred to by Professor Dowden are the best known of the ancient stories of which the scene is laid in the vicinity of Dublin. The first—the love story of Oscar and Aídeen—has fortunately attracted the genius of an Irish poet, Sir Samuel Ferguson, and he has given us in the fine verses entitled "Aídeen's Grave" (from which Dowden quotes), an admirable poetic rendering of a tale that comes down to us from the *Fianna*. In his introduction to the poem Ferguson writes that Aídeen, daughter of Angus of Ben Edar, died of grief for the loss of her husband Oscar, son of Oisín, who was slain at the Battle of Gavra. Oscar was entombed in the rath or earthen fortress that occupied part of the field of battle, the rest of the slain being cast in a heap outside. Aídeen is said to have been buried at Howth, near the mansion of her father, and poetical tradition represents the Fenian heroes as being present at her obsequies. The cromlech in Howth Park is said to be her sepulchre.

Ferguson does not adhere to the version of this story that is found in the old manuscripts. In these it is related that Oscar met Étain of the Fair Hair, daughter of Ædú of the White Breast, at the Hill of the Sidhe at Ben Edar, and wooed and wed her. After a while Oscar got a great wound at a battle at Ben Edar, and Finn and the *Fianna* were as if they had lost their wits. When Étain came to the bed where Oscar lay and saw that the great king-like shape was gone from him, grayness and darkness came on her, and she raised pitiful cries. She went to her bed and her heart broke like a nut, and she died of grief for her husband and her first love. Oscar,

however, lived to fight another day, for it was not then that he died, but afterwards at the Battle of Gavra.

The description in the poem of the first meeting of the lovers—when Aideen

“Unconscious of thy Oscar’s gaze,  
 She filled the fragrant pail.  
 And duteous from the running brook  
 Drew water for the bath ; nor deemed  
 A king did on her labour look  
 And she a fairy seemed ”—

is taken by Ferguson from the story of the wooing of King Cormac and Eithne.

The second of the legends referred to by Professor Dowden, the story of Tristan and Iseult, is one of the great love stories of the world. In the English edition of an old German version of this famous ballad it is said with truth that there is no nation which does not know the story of Tristan and Iseult, no important European literature of which it does not form a part. It was a favourite subject with the mediæval poets, and a large and varied literature has grown up around it in different languages. “The very popularity of the story has tended to make the elucidation of its origin and growth more than usually difficult ; it has passed through so many hands, and become compounded of so many elements. As we have it now, we can detect Celtic names and localities, incidents derived from Northern and Germanic sources, loans from classical tradition, survivals of Aryan folk-lore, shared alike by all nations of the same stock—all these elements welded into a coherent whole by French genius ; for the story first assumed coherent shape in the French-speaking world.” Of the many versions of it in existence the best is that of Gottfried Von Strassburg, one of the greatest of the mediæval poets of Germany. A large measure of Gottfried’s success in his narrative poem on the subject is due to the fact that he used a version of the story which was the work of Thomas of Brittany, an Anglo-Norman writer of superior genius and real literary skill,

and which differed in some respects from that popularised by the wandering minstrels. Of the other versions, that of Sir Thomas Malory, which is best known in England, represents the latest and most corrupt tradition, and is probably the worst of those that have survived since it traduces all the principal characters, and represents the great love tale in the light of a low and sordid intrigue. This is, unfortunately, the version used by Tennyson in his "Last Tournament." Wagner, in the opera "Tristan and Isolde," and Swinburne in his "Tristram of Lyonesse," only deal with a portion of the story, but both do full justice to the theme as far as the limitations which they have assigned to themselves permit. The only Irish poet, as far as we know, that refers to the tale is Sir Samuel Ferguson. In "Mesgedra," towards the end of the poem, he mentions the names that are connected with Moy-Liffey and which make places memorable in the beautiful valley of the river.

"Not all inglorious in thy elder day  
 Art thou, Moy-Liffey; and the loving mind  
 Might round thy borders many a gracious lay  
 And many a tale not unheroic find.

. . . . .

Tears into eyes as beautiful might start  
 At tender record of Isolde's tears."

The story as told by Gottfried Von Strassburg is a narrative of some length, but we need only here concern ourselves with the portion of it that deals with Iseult's residence near Dublin. Tristan, nephew of King Mark of Cornwall, slew Morolt, who had come thither on behalf of Gurmun, King of Ireland, to demand tribute, but was himself wounded in the duel. Morolt warned him that the wound would be the cause of his death, because the sword with which it was inflicted was poisoned with a deadly poison, and none other could heal him save only his sister Iseult, Queen of Ireland. Tristan sailed to Ireland in order to be cured. Gottfried Von Strassburg relates thus the history of his

voyage to Dublin. "Then Tristan sailed night and day till they drew near the shores of Ireland, and when the land was well in sight he bade the captain steer for Dublin, for there he knew the Queen had her dwelling. And when they were near enough to see it well, the captain spake: 'Master, I see the city, what dost thou counsel.' " Tristan bade them to row nearer to the city when the evening came, to place him in a little boat with his harp and some food, and then to leave him. They left him alone as he bade, "floating hither and thither till the morning light; and when the day broke and the men of Dublin saw the rudderless boat tossing on the waves they bade men put out from the haven and see what it might be." When they drew near the music of Tristan's harp reached their ears, and the sweetest singing they had ever heard. The minstrel was found lying ill at the bottom of the boat, for, "sweet as 'he song was, Tristan's heart was not in it, but he sang as a martyr, out of his sorrow and sufferings." They towed him into the harbour and made the boat fast, and said: "Sir Minstrel, look well on this castle and fair town beside it, dost know what town it is?" "Nay, sirs, I know not what it may be," replied Tristan. "So will we tell thee; thou art at Dublin in Ireland." "Then praises be to God, who hath brought me to a kindly folk, for surely there will be some among ye who will help me in my need." The tale of the coming of the minstrel, of his deadly wound, and his sweet singing, was spread abroad all through the city. Amongst those who visited him was a priest of the Queen's household, who told her that there was a minstrel in the town sorely wounded, and dead, even while he lived, yet that never man born of woman might equal his skill, in music, or his courage. The Queen told her chamberlain to have him carried to her, and Tristan, who gave his name as Tantris, was borne to the Queen's house. "He had heard aforetime of the beauty and wisdom of Queen Iseult, for the fame of her had spread into all countries, and men spake of her as 'Iseult the fair, Iseult the wise, bright as the dawn in eastern skies.'" The Queen tended him day and night, and within twenty days the poison had gone



forth and the wound was healing. The Princess Iseult, daughter of the Queen, who "could speak both French and Latin beside her own Irish tongue, and play on the lute and harp and sing sweetly," came often and sat beside the minstrel's couch. Tristan, when cured, returned to Cornwall and bore tidings of the beauty of the Princess Iseult to King Mark. "Iseult," he said, "is so fair a maiden that all we hear of beauty is but as an idle tale compared with her. No child nor maiden of woman born was ever so fair to look upon. Erewhile I read that Aurora's daughter and her child fair Helen were the fairest of all women, that in them was gathered all beauty, as in a flower. Such a tale do I believe no longer. Iseult has robbed me of all faith in it. The sun of beauty dawned not in Greece, it hath risen in our own day, and the hearts and eyes of all men turn to Ireland, where the sun is born of the dawn—Iseult, daughter of Iseult. From Dublin doth it shine forth to gladden all men. Nor does her beauty lessen that of other women, rather through her fairness is all woman-kind honoured, and in her fame all women are crowned."

The men of Cornwall besought King Mark to marry Iseult and thus to bring an end to the strife between Ireland and Cornwall, and the King yielded to their entreaties. Tristan and a company of nobles were sent to Ireland with the offer of marriage. Iseult became aware that the minstrel Tantris was no other than Tristan, the slayer of her Uncle Morolt, from the fact that the splinter taken from Morolt's head exactly fitted a splinter that was lacking in Tristan's sword. She forgave him, and kept the deed secret. Tristan wooed her on behalf of his Uncle Mark of Cornwall, and won her hand. King Gurmun gave his daughter into Tristan's care to bring her in his ship to Cornwall.

The mother of Iseult gave her daughter's maid, Brangoene, a love potion, which was to be drunk on the night of her marriage with King Mark. This potion Brangoene mixed for Tristan and Iseult whilst they were on the voyage to Cornwall. They drank of it, unknowingly, and fell in love. After their arrival in Cornwall and the celebration of the nuptials of King

Mark and Iseult, the king discovered their love and banished Tristan, who went to Brittany. Here he was wounded by a poisoned weapon, and sent for Iseult, who had inherited her mother's skill in medicines. Tristan died before her arrival, and Iseult on discovering his death expired holding his dead body in her arms.

A tower that stood in the old city wall of Dublin, and which was known as Izod's Tower, preserved a memory of the fair princess, and Chapel-izod, on the Liffey, is said to be named after her. Professor Zimmer regards Tristan and his uncle as ninth century Pictish chieftains, and Iseult as the daughter of the Viking King of Dublin. Gottfried, and the other writers of his day, who only knew the story from a French source, give the name of the hero a French derivation. The more probable derivation is from the Pictish Drostan or Drustan.

The stories of Etain and Isolde are fixed at a point of time that was late in the legendary history of Ireland. Centuries before either of these two fair princesses walked the plains of upper earth, the neighbourhood of the present City of Dublin had been the scene of historic happenings. Even at the time when the Heroic Period of Irish History begins, and when Dana, Angus Oge, Mananaan MacLir and Morrighu, the gods of the race of the De Danaans, occupied the chief places in popular worship, there was a tradition amongst men that the people of the goddess Dana were not the first inhabitants of Ireland. The Celtic mythology resembles the Grecian in representing an old dim realm of gods as standing behind the existing Pantheon. In Greece it was Chronos and the Titans who had been dispossessed by Zeus, and in Ireland there were legends of an older race of colonists, the race of Partholan, who had preceded the De Danaans. They warred against the Fom̃orians, the original inhabitants of Ireland, and their gods, Balor Bress and Elathan, the malign powers of darkness, evil and death. The record of the existence of these autochthones of the country is the bone cave and the drift bank, where we still find their knives and hatchets of stone, with the fossil remains of the giant elk and the cave bear.

Bardic tradition tells us that their leader was named Cical.

Partholan and his colony first brought the primitive arts of life to Ireland. After remaining in Ireland for three hundred years a mysterious epidemic, lasting for a week, attacked the race of Partholan, and they, in their turn, perished. In premonition of their end, they gathered upon the original plain which they had first habited, then called "Sen Magh," or "Old Plain," so that those of them who survived might the more easily bury those who died. "Sen Magh" derived its name from the fact that it was open and cultivable from the beginning, unlike the other plains of Ireland, which had to be cleared of their primeval forests by these early colonists before cultivation could take place. It embraces the site of the present City of Dublin, and extends from Howth to the base of the Dublin mountains and along the banks of the Liffey. It was afterwards known as Slan-Magh-Ealta-Edair, the plain of the bird flocks of Edair, in memory of Edair, a famous chieftain who gave his name to Howth. With the exception of a few topographical names derived from the leaders of this race, the sole memorial of their occupation of the country is to be found near Dublin. The green mounds near Tallaght indicate the place where they were buried, and the village derives the name that it bears to the present day from this fact. Tallaght is but an abbreviated form of "Tamleacht Muntire Partholan," or "the plague ground of Partholan's people." Ferguson refers to the old tradition in his fine poem, "Congal":

"Forgotten, Partholan himself lies 'neath his royal mound

On green Moynalty, hushed at eve by drowsy sound;  
And clangorous songs of flocks by night, when through  
the wintry air

The wide-winged wild geese to their pools by Liffey's  
side repair."

That there is some basis of truth in the story of Partholan's colony and its destruction is proved by the

fact that there remains to this day scattered among the Tallaght hills many tumuli, cairns, stone cists, and other forms of graves, indicating that they once formed the necropolis of a whole tribe.

The confirmation, or partial confirmation, of this old tradition of the sepulture of one of the earliest races who inhabited Ireland opens up an interesting question as to the amount of actual history that may be enshrined in our ancient legends. The legends, themselves, are of the very greatest antiquity and are narrated in the oldest Irish manuscripts existing, which were copied from still more ancient books. The old chroniclers are at much pains to set down with extreme precision the dates of the several events, and they often go to the length of telling us the month, day, or week in which they happened. Their chronology is, it is true, quite factitious, and was the invention of writers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries; but the legends with which they deal were handed down to them from a much earlier period. The most important of the legends may be ascribed to a period that was many centuries before the written records that we now possess were committed to manuscripts.

The earliest account of the *Táin Bó Chualigne*, our great national epic, is found in the *Book of the Dun Cow*, which was written early in the twelfth century. But legend tells us that at the beginning of the seventh century this epic poem had not only been composed, but had actually become so obsolete as to be forgotten by the bards. This tradition shows that our myths and legends were given a literary form only after they had been many centuries in existence. They cannot be ascribed to the twelfth or even to the seventh century, but have come down to us from immemorial antiquity, and the bard who gave them an artistic shape was setting down the primitive traditions of our race. What Matthew Arnold says of the mediæval chroniclers of Wales is also true of the writers of our old Irish manuscripts. "Evidently the mediæval story-teller is pillaging an antiquity of which he does not fully possess the secret: he is like a peasant building his hut on the site of Halecarnassus or

Ephesus; he builds, but what he builds is full of materials of which he knows not the history, or knows by a glimmering tradition merely: stones 'not of this building,' but of an older architecture, greater cunninger, more majestic."

The legends themselves possess an historical value, and are probably as in the case of the earlier stories of the Roman people that we find in Livy, founded on events the accounts of which have been amplified and distorted by successive generations of story-tellers. There is, as Dr. Joyce remarks, an element of solidity that can be claimed for Irish legendary history, arising from the fact that the greater number of the places mentioned in the legends have been identified and retain their old names to the present day, and also that in nearly all cases these places contain raths, forts, pillar stones, cromlechs, tumuli, cairns and caves corresponding with the old narratives. Professor O'Curry pointed out that one of the most characteristic features of Irish historical legends and poems is the definite localisation of the personages, and incidents of the tales, and that it is owing to this characteristic that we are able to determine with great minuteness and accuracy the ancient topography of the country.

Mr. Standish O'Grady, who has told the old stories so beautifully in his "History of Ireland in the Mythical Period," in writing of the method of composition of the legends, and of the difficulty of distinguishing the truth from the fiction which they contain, says: "The ancient history of Ireland passed unceasingly into the realm of artistic representation, the history of one generation became the poetry of the next, till the whole island was illuminated and coloured by the poetry of the bards. Productions of mere fancy and imagination these songs were not, though fancy and imagination may have shaped all their subject matter, but the names are names of men and women who once lived and died in Ireland, and over whom their people raised the swelling rath, and reared the rocky cromlech. The memory of their achievements was kept fresh till the traditions were enshrined in tales and finally incorporated into the Leabhar-na-Huidhre



and the Book of Leinster. . . . Doubtless the legendary blends at some points with the historical narrative. The cloud and mist somewhere condense into the clear stream of indubitable fact. But how to discern under the rich and teeming myths of the bards the course of that slender and doubtful rivulet, or beneath the piled rubbish and dust of the chroniclers, discover the tiny track that elsewhere broadens into the highway of a nation's history. In this minute, circumstantial and most imposing body of history, where the certain legend exhibits the form of plain and probable narrative, and the certain fact displays itself with a mythical flourish, how there to fix on any one point and say here is the truth. It is a task perilous and perplexing."

Mr. Joyce states that the local name of the Malahide river—"the Muldowney river"—recalls the name of another ancient colony. The colonists who came to Ireland after the Parthalonians were the Fir Bolgs. They are known collectively as the Fir Bolgs, but were divided into three tribes—the Fir Bolgs, the Fir Domnan, and the Fir Gaillion. The place where they landed was called Inver Domnain in memory of the Fir Domnan, and it has been identified with the Bay of Malahide. The name Muldowney given to the river that flows into the sea here is a corruption of Maeil-Domnain, in which the word Maeil, meaning a whirlpool, is substituted for Inver.

Irish Heroic tradition may be divided into two chief cycles. In one cycle Conor, King of Ulster, occupies the central place, surrounded by Cuchulainn, Conall, Carnach, and the heroes of the Red Branch. In the second cycle Cormac, son of Art, is the central figure, though eclipsed by the more heroic forms of Finn and Oisín. The better defined and more characteristic forms of grandeur, with the stronger accompaniments of pity and terror, must be sought for in the first cycle of tales. There we are among the *rudera* of the literature of a period most barbaric, such as the great tragedians turned to immortal dramas in Greece, and Ovid converted into beautiful legends in Italy. The neighbour-

hood of Dublin is represented as the scene of events that connect with each of these two great cycles of stories.

It should be remembered that Dublin itself was not a place of any great importance at this early period. In the Heroic times the place where the city now stands was named Ath-Cliath, the Ford of the Hurdles, and it marked where the Liffey was crossed by the road from Tara to Cualann, which corresponds with our modern Wicklow. This road, called Slighe Cualann, one of the five great roads leading from Tara, which were constructed in the second century, passed through Dublin by Ratoath and on towards Bray. The old "Ford of the Hurdles," which in these times formed the only foot passage across the Liffey, and which gave the name of Ath-Cliath to the site of the present city, crossed the river where Whitworth Bridge, leading from Church Street to Bridge Street, now stands, and the road from Tara to Wicklow must necessarily have crossed the river at this point. The present Stonybatter formed a portion of this ancient road, as is evidenced by the fact that it lies straight in the line, and by the name that it now bears, which is a modern form of Bothar-na-Gloch. The ancient Irish roads, like the old Roman roads, were paved with large blocks of stone, and from this fact the name Bothar-na-Gloch or Road of the Stones was derived. The name is still preserved in the hybrid Anglo-Irish name of "Stonybatter," by which the district is still known. Booterstown, or "The Town by the Road," also derives its name from the fact that it was in the neighbourhood of this old road. Even in these early days, however, the site of the present city must have been of some importance, and owing to its favourable situation there must have been an assemblage of some sort of dwellings where the Liffey runs into the Irish Sea. There is nothing in our earliest legends to denote that in pre-Christian times the ancient Ath-Cliath had reached a position of any consequence, and the original name given to it appears to indicate that its importance was geographical rather than political. It was the ford which formed the most direct means of communication between the kingdoms of Meath and Leinster. The name

by which we now know it is said to have been derived from Dubh-Linn, a dark pool on the Liffey; but an old legend in the Dinnseanchas gives another derivation. Dubh, it tells us, was the wife of Enna. Enna had secretly another wife called Aeté. Dubh, who was a druidess, discovered this fact, and caused the tide to overwhelm Aeté's house by means of a charm, and to drown Aeté. Margenn, a servant of Aeté, who discovered the cause of her death, shot Dubh by means of a sling stone, and she fell into a pool in the Liffey, which was hence called Dubh-Linn. A ford on the Liffey was anciently known as Ath-liag-Mairgene, or the "Ford of Margenn's Sling Stone" from this incident, and it is said to have been situated in the neighbourhood of the present Wood Quay.

The noble hill which raises itself aloft like a sentinel at the entrance to Dublin Bay is frequently mentioned in the tales of the two great cycles. One of the traditional "prime tales" that were known by every duly qualified bard for ages prior to the twelfth century is the Story of the Siege of Howth, which still, happily, remains to us in a manuscript known as the Talland Etair. It tells how there lived in Ulster in the time of King Conor MacNessa, a poet named Aithirné, famed for his learning and his powers as a satirist. He was named Aithirné Ailghesach, or Aithirné the Importunate, from the fact that he never asked for a gift or preferred a request, but such as it was especially difficult to give, or dishonourable to grant. The poet set out from the Court of Ulster on a round of visits to the other provincial kings of Ireland, resolved that his conduct and demands should be so insulting as to force them to acts of hostility to him, which would bring down on them the overwhelming strength of Ulster and her Red Branch champions. With this object he insolently demanded the most costly gifts, which were yielded to him for the sake of peace. His powers as a satirist were so dreaded that Eochaid, King of Mid-Erin, bestowed on Aithirné his one remaining eye, which the presumptuous poet demanded of the already mutilated king, hardly expecting that his request would be granted, but desirous, if met

by a refusal, of fixing a quarrel. In Leinster, at King Mesgedra's Court in Naas, Aithirné demanded the gift of seven hundred white cows with red ears, and one hundred and fifty of the wives and daughters of the Leinster nobles to be carried into bondage in Ulster. This unreasonable petition was also granted, but the poet became suspicious of the intentions of Mesgedra, and sent to Conor for an escort of Ultonians, who were to meet him at the boundary of the two kingdoms, and repel any attempt at forced restitution of the booty which he suspected that the men of Leinster would make, when he had left their kingdom, and they would be free to attack him without infringing the laws of hospitality. At the ford of the Liffey, a causeway of hurdles was thrown across the river for the transport of his flocks. It was here, for the Liffey was at that time the boundary between the kingdoms of Leinster and Ulster, that, as Aithirné had anticipated, his late hosts, the instant he had passed out of the country, seized upon the women and cattle. A battle ensued, in which the Ultonians succeeded in forcing their retreat to the Hill of Howth, and carrying the cattle with them. From the summit of Howth the poet cursed the land he had left, and a blight fell on all things in Leinster. He continued, says a tract in the Book of Ballymote, for a full year to satirise the Leinstermen, and bring fatalities on them, so that neither corn, grass nor foliage grew for them that year. While Aithirné and the chieftains of Ulster were encamped on Howth many of the famed heroes of the North came to assist them, and various onslaughts were made on the men of Leinster.

The fighting went on day and night round the fort of Ben Edar. The manuscript states that the two lines of battle were joined from tierce to none. The Leinstermen were finally routed so that they raised a red wall of slain against the Ulstermen, for it was prohibited to the Ultonians to pass over a red wall. A great many of the northern warriors perished in the fight.

Amongst the Northern champions was Conall Carnach, whose brothers were slain during the siege, and who in reprisal slew Mesgedra at the Ford of Clane on the

Liffey. Aithirné's poetical revilings were even more terrible to the men of Leinster than the swords of the Red Branch knights, and at length, owing to the blighting effect of his satires, they were compelled to make him atonement for the death of his son, who had been killed in the contest, and for the outrage they had offered to a privileged bard. In Sir Samuel Ferguson's "Mesgedra" we have a splendid modern version of this ancient bardic story, and of the fight between Conall Carnach that took place near the river bank :—

"When glades were green where Dublin stands to-day  
And limpid Liffey, fresh from wood and wold,  
Bridgeless and fordless, in the lonely Bay  
Sank to her rest on sands of stainless gold."

In another of his poems Ferguson pays a splendid tribute to the poet that had sung on Ben Edar nineteen centuries before him :—

"Sing while you may, nor grieve to know  
The song you sing shall also die :  
Atharna's lay has perished so,  
Though once it thrilled this sky.  
Above us, from his rocky chair,  
There where Ben Edar's landward crest  
O'er eastern Bregia bends, to where  
Dun Almon crowns the west :  
And all that felt that fretted air  
Throughout the song-distempered clime  
Did droop, till suppliant Leinster's prayer  
Appeased the vengeful rhyme."

The present Bailey Lighthouse at the extremity of Howth Head marks the site of the fort of one of our earliest kings, Crimthann (surnamed Nuad Nair), as the old name, Dun Criffan, under which this part of the hill was known, indicates. The lines of circumvallation of the ancient fort are still to be discovered in the form of two trenches that cross the neck of the promontory. Other remains which formerly existed were obliterated during the progress of the lighthouse works early in the



last century. Crimthann married the goddess Nair, who brought him over the sea to a strange country where he abode a month and a half. He returned to Ireland bringing a rich store of presents, including a chariot wrought entirely of gold, a golden chess board incrustated with precious stones; a sword with serpents of carved gold; a shield with reliefs of silver; a sling which never failed to reach its mark, and two dogs held by a chain of silver, so beautiful that it was valued at three hundred bondmaids. He died from a fall off his horse six weeks after his return to Ireland, and he is said to be buried on Shel Martin, the highest point of the Hill of Howth.

In their wanderings through various parts of Ireland before their departure to Alba, we find Deirdre and the sons of Usnach remaining for a time at Ben Edar. There, too, another pair of lovers, famed in Irish story, Diarmid and Grania, took refuge when pursued by Finn, and stayed hidden in a cave, befriended by an old woman who helped them to keep watch. Finn met the old woman one day and questioned her, and she was false to her trust and told him where Diarmid and Grania lay concealed. Finn bade her to detain them in the cave until such time as he could return with the Fianna. A false statement that the old woman made on her return led Grania to suspect her, and she advised Diarmid to escape. The lovers found a boat at shelter in the harbour close by and went into it. There was a man in the boat with beautiful clothes and an embroidered golden yellow cloak over his shoulders. They knew it was Angus Oge, the God of Love, who had come to help them to escape, and they went with him to his home at Brugh-na-Bouine.

Ben Edar is frequently mentioned in the Ossianic poems as a favourite hunting place of Finn and his companions. In the Colloquy of the Ancients, the oldest collection of Irish stories, it is referred to as the place where Finn mustered his battalions, and also as the regular port of entry and departure for central Ireland. It was there that the King of Thessaly's son landed to run a wager for the tribute of all Ireland, and it was there also that the Tuatha De Danaan undertook to have

a ship always in readiness to carry Finn's messengers or champions wherever they might choose to go. It was the great look-out point of the mid-eastern coast of Ireland, and the Fianna always kept a sentinel here to sweep the horizon for wanderers. According to some writers, the name Ben Edar is derived from the Danaan chieftain Edar, the son of Edgaeth, who was buried there; other writers say the name was given to it from Edar, the wife of Gann, one of the five Firbolg brothers who divided Ireland between them.

Castleknock, or as it was then known "Cnucha," is also often referred to in the stories of the Fenian cycle. This cycle, it should be remarked, begins before the birth of Finn with the story of the struggle of two rival clans, each of which claimed to be the real and only Fianna Eirean. They were the Clanna Morna, under the leadership of Goll MacMorna, and the Clanna Baoisgne, commanded by Finn's father, Cumhal. A battle was fought between the two clans at Cnucha, in which Goll killed Cumhal and the Clanna Baoisgne was defeated and scattered. The battle was caused by the abduction of Muirni Muincaem by Cumhal, and his refusal to send her back or to pay any restitution to her father, or to the king for the violation of the law. After the battle Cumhal's wife bore a posthumous son, and he was brought up amongst the Slieve Bloom mountains in great secrecy lest his father's enemies should find him out and kill him. The posthumous son of Cumhal is the Finn MacCumhal famed in Irish story.

One of the favourite amusements of the Fianna when not employed in war was hunting, and during the long excursions that they made in pursuit of game, they had certain hills which were favourite resting-places in the intervals of the chase. These hills are called Suidhe-Finn (Seefin), Finn's seat, or resting-place, and they are found in each of the four provinces. The name appears to have originally been given to the cairn on the summit of the hill, and to have been applied afterwards to the hill itself. One of the hills overlooking the beautiful valley of Glennasmole, that lies between the Dublin mountains, was, as its name still indicates, one of these

resting places of the leader of the Fianna. Many of the old Irish poems that describe the hunting of Finn make mention of the valley itself. Here it was that, accompanied by his two swift hounds, Bran and Sgeolan, he chased an enchanted doe. An old poem called the "Chase of Glennasmole" relates how Finn met an ugly witch in the glen, who had come across the seas from Greece, and who cast spells on Finn and his companions in order to compel him to marry her. She marched with an army of amazons from Ben Edar, and was at length killed by one of Finn's bodyguard.

The story of the disappearance of Oisín, the Bard of the Fianna, with Niamh of the Golden Hair is well known. When Oisín had dwelt three hundred years with Niamh he asked the fairy queen to allow him to return to earth once more in order to see the men of the Fianna again. Niamh granted this request, but told him not to let his foot touch earthly soil. Oisín set out from Tir n'an Og to Ireland on a fairy steed. He went first to the Hill of Allen, but could discover no trace of the Fianna there. Then he turned towards the eastern sea of Erin and came to Glennasmole. He saw on a field on the hillside a great number of men who were striving to roll a great boulder from the tilled land. Oisín stooped from his saddle to help them, and with one great heave he sent the boulder tumbling down the hill. As he did so the saddle girth broke with the strain, and he touched the earth with his feet. The fairy horse vanished and Oisín rose from the ground no longer young and fair, but a bent and withered old man.

"The Chase of Lough Lein," one of the many poems that have as their subject imaginary dialogues between St. Patrick and Oisín, refers to Glennasmole as one of the favourite haunts of the great Bard of the Fianna. The poem describes the poet as staying in the saint's house and as being dissatisfied with his treatment there. He boasts to St. Patrick of the great deeds of the Fianna, and complains of the scanty fare with which he was supplied at his table. "I often," he said, "slept abroad on the hills under the grey dew on the foliage of the trees, and I was not accustomed to go supperless to bed while

there was a stag on yonder hill." "Thou hast not a bed without food," replied St. Patrick, "for thou gettest seven cakes of bread, a large roll of butter, and a quarter of beef every day." The fare would have appeared ample for a bard in our own degenerate days, but it did not satisfy the son of Finn, who rejoined bitterly: "I saw a berry of the rowan tree larger twice than thy roll, and I saw an ivy leaf larger and wider than thy cake of bread, and I saw a quarter of a blackbird which was larger than thy quarter of beef. It is this that fills my soul with sadness to be in thy house." In order to prove his assertions the aged bard set out to Glennasmole accompanied by a serving boy. When they arrived in the glen, Oisín raised a rock that was there, and bade the lad take from under it three things, a great sounding horn of the Fianna, a ball of iron that they used for throwing, and a very sharp sword. Oisín told the lad to sound a blast of the horn. The boy sounded it without producing any result. Then Oisín took the horn and blew three great blasts. Three flights of birds appeared, the third flight the biggest and blackest the world ever saw. They let loose the dog which they brought with them, and he killed one of the birds, the biggest of them all, which had a shadow like a cloud. Oisín bade the lad cut a quarter off the bird and open his body. Within the bird's body was a rowan berry, the largest the boy had ever seen, and an ivy leaf bigger than the widest girdle. With these they returned to St. Patrick and convinced him of the truth of the bard's statements.

Many others of the Ossianic poems refer to Glennasmole. In one of them it is described as "a place full of witchcraft." The tradition of the heroic figures who lived there survived until the middle of the last century amongst the Irish-speaking people of the glen. A huge granite boulder in the grounds of a lodge at the head of the glen was known as Finn MacCumhal's stone, and there was a tradition that he had borne it here from one of the mountains opposite. Miss Mary Furlong, in her beautiful little poem, "Glennasmole," surmises that the

fairies all left the place when the people of Rathmines built the reservoir for their water supply here.

“ In the Thrushes’ mystic glen  
Are the only dwellers men?  
When the ghostly moonlight glimmers,  
And the singing river shimmers,  
Do the fairies never come—  
Are their nimble feet grown numb?

Ah! I think the fairies fled  
When the mountain people said :  
‘ In this chrystal-watered valley  
Skill and labour both shall rally,  
Mighty earthen walls shall build  
And the valley shall be filled.

Filled with clear pellucid rills  
That are born within the hills,  
They shall gather all these fountains  
Flowing sweetly from the mountains,  
Cunningly shall bear them down  
To the distant thirsty town.”

Bohernabreena, at the entrance to Glennasmole, derives its name from the fact that through it passed the road to the Court of Da Derga, one of the six great houses of hospitality that existed in the early days in Ireland. The scene of the story of the death of King Conary Mor, one of the oldest of our Irish Bardic tales, is laid at Da Derga’s Court. King Conary, whose accession to the throne is said to have synchronised with the first year of the Christian era, enjoyed a long and prosperous reign and was famed for the justice and impartiality with which he administered the affairs of his kingdom. Mr. Standish O’Grady classes him with Angus, the Eros of the Gaelic myths, and Cormac Mac Art as the three stars of unsurpassed beauty in the Irish Bardic firmament. His inflexible administration of justice eventually brought about his own death. Amongst other turbulent nobles whom he banished from his kingdom were his own foster brothers,



the four sons of Don Dessa, a powerful prince of Leinster. The outlawed nobles took to piracy, and after some wanderings on the sea, returned to Ireland at the head of a predatory expedition. They landed at Malahide and marched towards Tara, laying waste the country through which they passed. Conary was returning from a visit to Munster, and had proceeded as far as Lusk, when finding the plain of Meath wrapped in flames, he turned back and made his way by Tallaght to the Court of Da Derga. Here he was hospitably received and sheltered by his friend Da Derga, but the Court was attacked by the pirates, and after a brave but unavailing resistance it was sacked and plundered. Conary Mor and his small band of followers were put to the sword. They fought bravely but were defeated by reason of the superior number of the marauders, and also by the wiles and enchantments which their enemies called to their aid. King Conary and nearly all of those who were with him in the house were slain.

The story is splendidly told in Sir Samuel Ferguson's fine poem "Conary," a poem in which, as Mr. Aubrey de Vere notes, the modern poet "has caught thoroughly the epic character so remarkable in those Bardic legends which were transmitted orally through ages when Homer must have been a name unknown in Ireland." The exact site of Da Derga's Hostel is doubtful. The great road from Tara to Cualann, near which it was situated, ran through the Tallaght hills, and it is maintained by some authorities that the Court was at Bohernabreena. In a note to "Conary" Ferguson says that the Court would appear to have been situated on the Dodder, and at the part of the stream where it was crossed by the high road through Dublin to the district anciently known as Cualann. Two highways led in this direction, one by the sea road and one by Booterstown. Both converged into one main road near Booterstown. Ferguson fixes on a mound near the Dodder, a little to the right of Donnybrook Catholic Church, as the site of the Court. A discovery of some spear heads of an antique pattern, and of a number of skeletons, most of them decapitated and bearing marks of a violent death, that was made here during Ferguson's

own lifetime, by some workmen who were preparing the land for building purposes seemed to confirm his opinion, as both the weapons and the human remains were of an early type. Antiquarians have, however, decided that the spear heads cannot be taken as dating back to the time of King Conary, and the site of the famous Hostel of Da Derga thus remains a matter of some uncertainty.

There was another court of general hospitality at Lusk, and this, too, is the scene of a famous Bardic story, the "Wooring of Emer." Emer was the daughter of Forgall Monach or Forgall "the Wily," the chieftain who maintained this hostel. Cuchulainn heard of her beauty and accomplishments and set out from Emania accompanied by Laegh, his faithful charioteer, to woo the fair maiden of Leinster, and make her his wife. When he arrived at Forgall's dún at Lusk he found her with her companions pursuing their customary duties and amusements. Emer possessed as many accomplishments as Cuchulainn, for she had "the gift of beauty of person, the gift of voice, the gift of music, the gift of embroidery and all needlework, the gift of wisdom, and the gift of virtuous chastity." She asked Cuchulainn from whence he had come and he told her. In reply to his questions concerning herself she states proudly: "I am a Tara of women, the whitest of maidens, one who is gazed at, but who gazes not back, a rush too far to be reached, an untrodden way. . . . I was brought up in ancient virtues, in lawful behaviour, in the keeping of chastity, in rank equal to a queen, in stateliness of form, so that to me is attributed every noble grace among the hosts of Erin's women." Cuchulainn boasts to her of his own deeds and breeding. He has been reared amongst heroes and champions at Conchobar's court, when he is weakest his strength is that of twenty, alone he will fight against forty, a hundred men will feel safe under his protection. "Truly," replied Emer, "they are goodly feats for a tender boy, but they are not yet those of chariot chiefs." In addition to her other gifts she was dowered to an unusual degree with the gift of discretion and self-effacement because she at first refused to listen to Cuchulainn as she was but the younger of Forgall's two daughters,

and she told her vehement suitor that her elder sister was as yet unwed. She praised the virtues and charms of her elder sister and advised Cuchulainn to become a suitor for the hand of that lady. This course did not recommend itself to him, and he pressed her still further, only to be answered with gentle but proud decision. She was to be won by deeds, not by words, and the man she chose for her husband must be famed wherever the exploits of heroes were sung. "Even as thou hast commanded, so shall all by me be done," said Cuchulainn.

Forgall heard of the wooing of his daughter by Cuchulainn, and was unwilling that she should become the wife of the Hero of Ulster. He presented himself at King Conchobar's Court in the guise of a stranger, praised the feats of arms that were exhibited in his honour by Cuchulainn and the Knights of the Red Branch, but suggested to the King that the warriors should complete their training by spending a time under the direction of Scatha, on the island of Skye. Cuchulainn thus became one of Scatha's pupils, and was removed for a time from Erin, which was the secret object that Forgall had in view when he recommended this scheme. When he was perfected in all knightly accomplishments Cuchulainn returned to Ireland, and once more presented himself at Lusk as a suitor for Emer's hand. The lady was closely guarded in her father's fortress, but love laughs at locksmiths. Cuchulainn stormed the fort and bore her away to Ulster after various fights with her father's followers at the fords and passes in the line of country between Lusk and Armagh.

Garristown, in the north of County Dublin, was the scene of the great battle of Gavra in which the Fianna Eirean were defeated. Cairbre, who became King of Ireland in succession to his father, Cormac MacArt, had a daughter who was sought in marriage by the King of Decies. The marriage was arranged, but the Fenians claimed a tribute of twenty ingots of gold before it could take place, as they insisted that they had acquired by custom a right to this payment on such occasions. The Fianna, from having been a military force for the defence of the kingdom, would appear from this bold demand to have become a distinct power in the State, and to have

begun to use their organisation for oppressive purposes. Cairbre resolved to take up arms against them. He refused the tribute and summoned all the provincial kings to help him. The old feud between the Clann Morna and the Clann Baoisgne broke out afresh, and the Clann Morna and the King of Munster came to the assistance of Cairbre. The battle took place at Garristown, and there was such tremendous slaughter on both sides that none but old men and young boys were left in Ireland after the fight. The Fianna were defeated and exterminated.

Besides the traditions that have come down to us of the heroic figures that inhabited the neighbourhood of Dublin at the earliest period of our national history we have other evidences of their existence in the monuments of various kinds that are scattered throughout the county. There are fine cromlechs at Howth, Kilternan, Shanganagh, Hollypark, Mount Venus, Shankill and Glendruoid. Mr. Borlase in his work on the Dolmens of Ireland mentions the cromlech on Mount Venus as one of the most magnificent of the megalithic monuments in Europe. Some idea of its size may be gained from the fact that the weight of the covering stone is estimated at forty-two tons. On Dalkey Island there is an ancient dun which, the Four Masters state, was erected by Sedgha, one of the leaders of the Milesian colony. A tumulus similar in character to those at Howth and Newgrange was discovered at Lusk in 1889. Underneath a large barrow there is a sepulchral chamber about eight feet long and six feet wide approached by a stone-constructed passage. During the progress of certain works in the Phoenix Park four stone cists were discovered on a hill in the neighbourhood of the Royal Hibernian Military School, each containing an urn of baked clay in which there were calcined bones and ashes. Two skeletons were also found in a chamber there, and from the form of their skulls Sir William Wilde was of opinion that they belonged to persons of the Firbolgian race. Many of the mountains that lie southward of the city have on their summit the cairn of a dead king or chieftain. These "chronicles of clay and stone," the cairn, the dun, the rath, speak as

eloquently as the written chronicles of the great race that lived in Eiré two thousand years ago :—

Great was their deeds, their passions and their sports :

With clay and stone

They piled on strath and shore those mystic forts,  
Not yet o'erthrown ;

On cairn-crowned hills they held their council-courts,

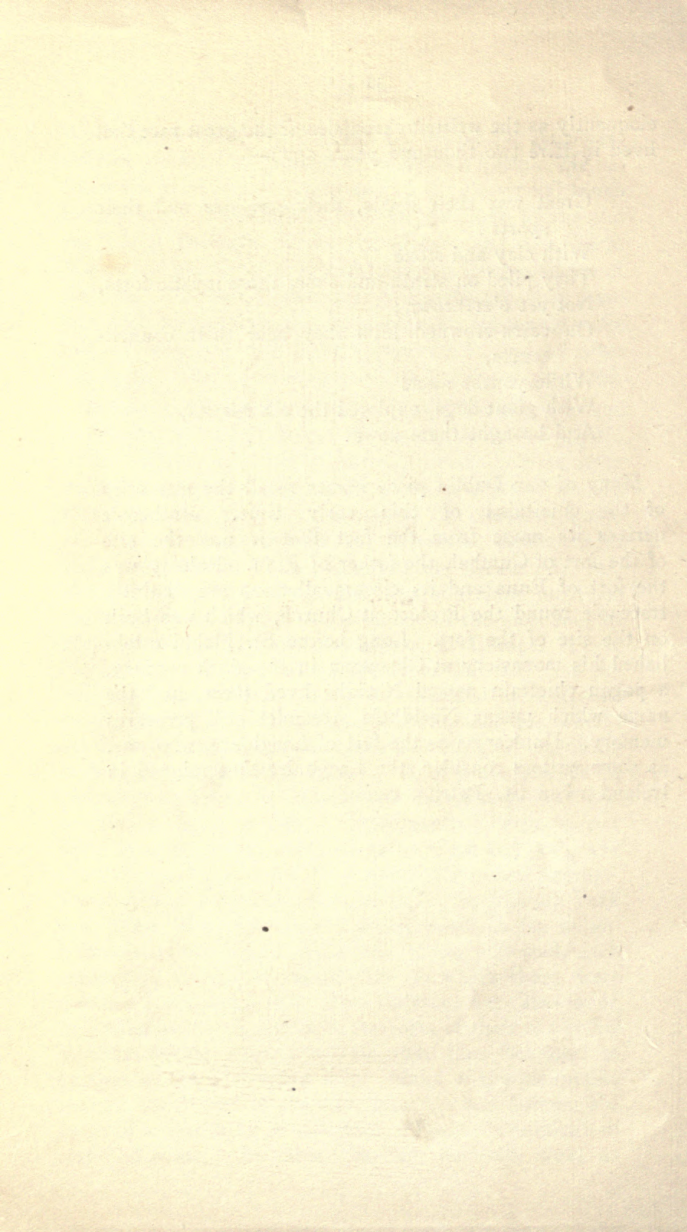
While youths alone

With giant dogs, explored the elk resorts,

And brought them down.

Many of our Dublin place names recall the memories of the chieftains of this early time. Rathcoole derives its name from the fact that it was the site of the fort of Cumhal, the father of Finn. Raheny was the fort of Enna and its circumvallations are distinctly traceable round the Protestant Church, which was built on the site of the fort. Long before St. Mobhi established his monastery at Glasnevin in the sixth century, a pagan chieftain named Naeidhe lived there, and the name which means Naeidhe's streamlet still preserves memory. Dunleary was the fort of Laeghaire, who was, as some writers consider, the Laeghaire that reigned in Ireland when St. Patrick came.







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